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Research Note

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EXPORT OF CHRISTMAS TREES FROM MONTANA IN 1964

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ABSTRACT

Truck and rail shipments of Christmas trees from Montana in 1964 totaled only 2 million, the smallest number since 1942. This paper discusses improved quality of exported trees, notes damage by insects and disease, and compares volume of 1964 shipments with that of selected earlier years.

Shipments of Christmas trees from Montana in 1964[1] totaled only some 2 million trees, a decrease of 5 percent from shipments in 1963.[2] This decline continued the general downward trend that started in 1957 after record-breaking shipments of 4.2 million trees in 1956.[3] In 1964, Montana exports were 4.9 percent of the estimated total Christmas tree consumption in the United States, compared with 10.6 percent in 1948 and 8.6 percent in 1955.

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[1] This report deals only with shipments of trees to markets outside Montana. Consumption within the State is estimated at 160,000 trees. Each interstate railway line supplied data for trees shipped by rail; the State Forester and National Forests supplied figures on truck shipments.

[2] Spencer, John S., Jr. Montana Christmas tree exports reach lowest level since survey was begun in 1942. U.S. Forest Serv., Intermountain Forest and Range Expt. Sta. Res. Note INT-24, 4 pp., illus. 1964.

[3] Wilson, Alvin K. A new high in Montana Christmas tree shipments. U.S. Forest Serv., Intermountain Forest and Range Expt. Sta. Res. Note 44, 4 pp., illus. 1957.

Damage caused by insects and diseases has accompanied this general downward trend. Although it continued to plague producers in 1964, the quality of trees was reported to be the best in recent years in the more important producing areas. This improvement may result from stricter grading and from the demand for higher quality trees. New damage from insects and disease appears to have decreased in some areas, but the incidence of these pests varies by locality.

Continued heavy damage from Douglas-fir needle midge and needlecast (Christmas tree blight) was reported in the Libby area. Flathead County reported very little needlecast damage, but forest pathologists found the disease very prevalent in certain areas of the Bitterroot Valley and in the vicinity of Flathead Lake. They also pointed out that the cool, wet spring and summer of 1964 favored the spread of needlecast disease, and may have resulted in heavy new infection that will not be detected until the 1965 surveys begin.

Damage from defoliation by the spruce budworm continued over an extensive area of the State, principally in Douglas-fir stands. Aerial surveys of visible damage indicated a decrease in defoliation in some areas, notably the Bitterroot and Deerlodge National Forests, but an increase in defoliation in the Helena, Lewis and Clark, and Beaverhead National Forests. The total area of budworm defoliation in the State was approximately 2 million acres, about the same as in 1963.

Shipments from Lincoln County increased 7 percent over those for 1963. Lincoln County thus became the leading producer in 1964 with a total export of 937,000 trees. Shipments from Sanders and Lake Counties increased by more than 20 percent over 1963 levels, and exports from Granite County increased substantially.

These increases were more than offset by decreased shipments from Flathead County, the leading producer in 1963. Shipments from Flathead County in 1964 were 672,000 trees, down 230,000 from 1963. In addition, shipments from Missoula County declined about 50 percent from 1963 volume.

Rail shipments were slightly higher in 1964, and thus reversed the downward trend for several preceding years. Shipments to Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Kansas were notably higher than in 1963. However, shipments to California dropped sharply, and Iowa and Nebraska, two other leading consumers, also received fewer rail-shipped trees from Montana in 1964. Truck shipments declined by about 100,000 trees from 1963.

Exports of Christmas trees from Montana have declined, but total consumption of Christmas trees in the United States increased substantially through 1962. Insect and disease damage, which reduces the number of high quality trees available for harvest in natural stands, has probably contributed to the decline in Montana exports.

Another factor that may significantly influence Christmas tree exports from Montana is the increasing competition wild-grown trees face in national markets. This competition is chiefly of two sorts: trees grown in plantations, and artificial trees. It has been estimated that trees grown in plantations, which are often pruned to produce good form and quality, accounted for 44 percent of the Christmas trees purchased in the United States in 1964.[4]

In addition, many families are buying artificial Christmas trees. One recent study indicated that about one out of five Utah families used artificial trees in 1964.[5] Buyers cited attractiveness, economy, and convenience as important reasons for purchasing artificial trees. These changing market conditions may well account for some of the decline in Montana exports, but as yet we have no definite data to confirm this speculation.

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[4] Correspondence with A. M. Sowder, Federal Extension Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

[5] Hunt, John O., and William D. Poulsen. Impact of artificial Christmas trees on the Utah Christmas tree market. Farm and Home Science. March 1965. Agr. Expt. Sta., Utah State Univ., Logan, Utah.

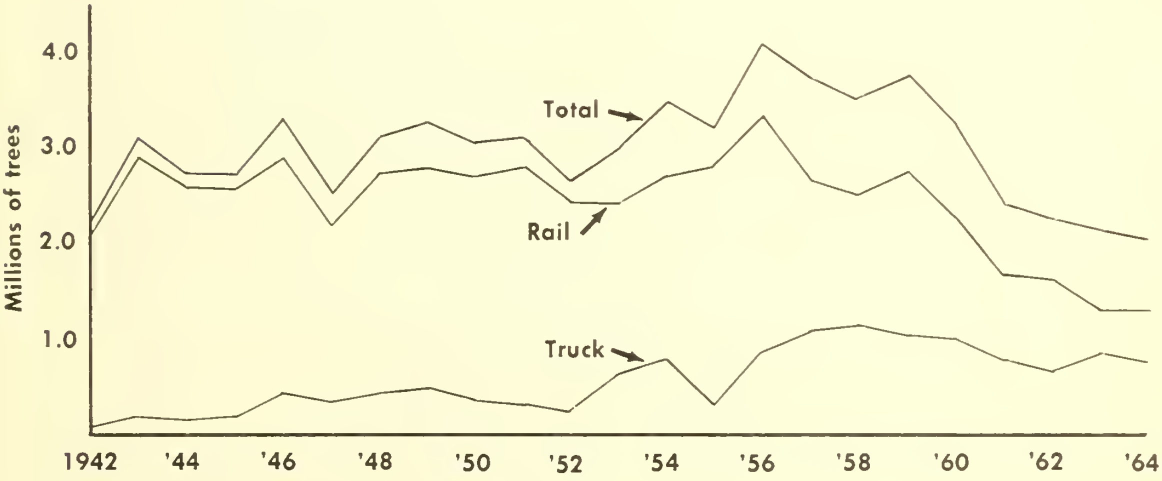

Figure 1.--Shipments of Christmas trees from Montana, 1942-1964.

Table 1.--Shipments of Christmas trees by rail and truck from Montana, by counties, 1964 and 1963

County	1964			1963		
	Rail	Truck	Total	Rail	Truck	Total
	Thousands of trees					
Lincoln	523	414	937	556	316	872
Flathead	456	216	672	465	437	902
Lake	181	5	186	147	6	153
Sanders	109	22	131	76	30	106
Granite	--	32	32	--	3	3
Missoula	14	13	27	38	15	53
Other	10	11	21	5	11	16
Total	1,293	713	2,006	1,287	818	2,105

Table 2.--Rail shipments of Montana trees to principal markets by States, 1964 and 1963

State	1964		1963	
	Thousands of trees	Percent	Thousands of trees	Percent
Texas	385	30	328	25
Oklahoma	195	15	171	13
Missouri	142	11	128	10
Kansas	142	11	114	9
California	104	8	161	13
Iowa	76	6	109	8
Louisiana	66	5	47	4
Nebraska	48	4	62	5
Other	135	10	167	13
Total	1,293	100	1,287	100

Table 3.--United States consumption and Montana exports of Christmas trees, selected years

Year	Total U.S. consumption[1]	Montana exports	Montana exports as percent of U.S. consumption
	Thousands of trees		
1948	29,383	3,123	10.6
1955	37,791	3,235	8.6
1960	42,050	3,200	7.6
1962	43,487	2,249	5.2
1964	40,925	2,006	4.9

[1] Data for 1948-1962: Sowder, A. M. Christmas tree data for 1962. Jour. Forestry 61: 869-871. Data for 1964 from correspondence (text footnote 4).